

In The Claims:

Please cancel claims 2 and 8 without prejudice and subject to Applicant's right to pursue these claims in related applications, amend claims 1 and 3-7, and add new claims 11-18, so that the claims hereafter read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A composition comprising:
a thixotropic pharmaceutically acceptable gel; and
containing an antimicrobial agent contained in the
thixotropic gel;
wherein the thixotropic gel is characterized by:
 - (i) easy flow under the shear forces imparted by a
conventional medical syringe such that the composition may be
instilled into, and withdrawn from, a hemodialysis catheter using
such a conventional medical syringe;
 - (ii) sufficient cohesiveness such that, when the
composition is moved through the lumen of a hemodialysis catheter
using a conventional medical syringe, the composition advances
through the lumen as a cohesive rod-shaped mass; and
 - (iii) when the composition is disposed within the lumen
of a hemodialysis catheter which is installed in the vascular

system of a patient, the composition remains in the lumen substantially without leakage; and

wherein the thixotropic gel is biocompatible and biodegradable in blood used for catheter protection.

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Currently Amended) A composition according to as in claim 1 wherein the said gel is a hydrogel.

4. (Currently Amended) A composition according to as in claim 1 wherein the said gel is a microgel.

5. (Currently Amended) A composition according to as in claim 1 wherein the antimicrobial agent is taurolidine, taurultam or a mixture thereof.

6. (Currently Amended) A composition according to as claimed in claim 1 wherein the said gel also contains a an medically acceptable anticoagulant agent.

7. (Currently Amended) A composition according to as
~~claimed in any of the~~ claim 1 wherein the said composition
contains salicylic acid or one of its salts.

8. (Canceled)

9. (Withdrawn) A locking agent for an indwelling catheter
that is composed of a thixotropic gel or a colloidal fluid that
is retained in the catheter with minimal loss during instillation
and/or the duration between uses of the catheter and can be
instilled and withdrawn using a syringe.

10. (Withdrawn) A catheter lock solution according to claim
9 in which the agent is albumin.

11. (New) A composition according to claim 3 wherein the
hydrogel is a natural polymer.

12. (New) A composition according to claim 11 wherein the
natural polymer comprises at least one selected from the group
consisting of: serum albumin; collagen; and alginates.

13. (New) A composition according to claim 3 wherein the hydrogel is a synthetic polymer.

14. (New) A composition according to claim 13 wherein the synthetic polymer comprises at least one selected from the group consisting of: polyvinyl alcohol; poly(ethylene oxide); poly(hydroxyethylene); and a polyelectrolyte.

15. (New) A composition according to claim 14 wherein the polyelectrolyte comprises at least one from the group consisting of: poly(acrylic acid); poly(styrene sulfonate); and carboxymethylcellulose (CMC).

16. (New) A system comprising:
a hemodialysis catheter; and
a catheter lock comprising a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein.

17. (New) A method for providing microbe-free access to the vascular system of a patient, the method comprising the steps of:
providing a hemodialysis catheter;

deploying the hemodialysis catheter into the vascular system of a patient; and

sealing the hemodialysis catheter with a catheter lock, wherein the catheter lock comprises a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein.

18. (New) A method for preventing microbial colonization of a lumen of a catheter placed within a patient, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a catheter lock, wherein the catheter lock comprises a thixotropic gel containing an antimicrobial agent therein; and

sealing the catheter with the catheter lock.

19. (New) A composition according to claim 1 wherein the gel is a colloidal suspension.

20. (New) A system according to claim 16 wherein the catheter is a hemodialysis catheter.